



## REWIRED Episode 5 - The town that says yes. Dubbo Solar farm podcast transcript

SOURCE	CONTENT
DAVE O'NEIL	I filmed a film called The Nugget in Mudgee. Which is like maybe an hour and half, two hours from Dubbo.
COURTNEY CARTY	This is comedian Dave O'Neil back in 2002 he was working on The Nugget with Stephen Curry and Eric Bana.  More recently, it's the music born in Dubbo that's front of mind.
DAVE O'NEIL	So Dubbo had a cinema so I would drive on the weekend to go to the cinema in Dubbo where I saw Bridget Jones' Diary, and thought it was pretty good. But I remember Dubbo having a very beautiful... I remember it's surrounded by park land... I remember thinking it's really beautiful and then going into town and getting some money out of the ATM and being scared by some of the guys hanging around looking at me. So it was an interesting place.
COURTNEY CARTY	What does he think of when someone says Dubbo?
DAVE O'NEIL	I think of The Reels immediately... the Reels and also the Zoo... they've got an amazing zoo there.
COURTNEY CARTY	The Zoo, that's the Taronga Western Plains Zoo. It draws around a quarter of a million visitors each year to the town of 40 thousand. It's one reason there's so many motels here, they're everywhere.  The Reels were a local band most people of certain age will know straight away. In a few casual conversations people mention they went to school with Craig or their brothers were friends.

DAVE O'NEIL	But The Reels were a great band featuring Dave Mason and they had songs like Prefab Heart.
MUSIC	Prefab Heart
COURTNEY CARTY	30 years on it's less the local musician that people are chatting about, now it's the two new large scale solar farms under construction. One just out of Dubbo, and the other out to the west where Glenn McGrath grew up, in the town of Narromine.
MUSIC	Theme...
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>I'm Courtney Carthy and welcome to <i>Rewired</i>... an insight into new large scale solar farms being constructed around Australia.</p> <p>These two solar farms, like most others in the series, are part of a recent grant round from ARENA, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, for 12 new large scale solar farms around the country.</p> <p>And later in the episode we'll hear more about how far solar has come from Amy Kean, she's the NSW Renewable Energy Advocate.</p>
AMY KEAN	I don't think we realised how quickly it was going to grow from effectively a new industry, to an industry that's now quickly beginning to operate on its own without government subsidies and that's exactly what we want out of new industries but that transition has happened so quickly.
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>Since the first large scale solar was built in Australia the costs have dropped dramatically, the construction processes are improving and so is the efficiency of the panels.</p> <p>If this is the first episode you've listened to, there are four others already available featuring different towns around the country.</p> <p>Kidston in Queensland, Griffith, Parkes and the small town of Nyngan in NSW.</p>
MUSIC	

COURTNEY CARTY	<p>Getting to Dubbo, you head west from Sydney over the Blue Mountains to Bathurst then take a right turn north up the highway twice the distance you've just driven again to reach the centre of town on the Macquarie River.</p> <p>While only about 40,000 people live in the town it serves as a hub for up to 200,000 in the greater catchment, less than 3 percent of people in Dubbo work in farming. It's more geared towards to providing services to smaller areas nearby.</p> <p>So first, let's head out to Narromine.</p>
SFX	<p>Courtney at the Cafe then in the car.</p> <p>Car sounds.</p> <p>Courtney in the car getting to the solar farm.</p>
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>It's early days here so only a few people are currently on site. The piles are in and soon the tracking system, the rockers that keep the panels facing the sun, will go on.</p> <p>And I find Chris Rowland, construction manager and Justin Shepherd the project manager at work in the site office.</p>
SFX	<p>G'day Mate Chris Rowland, how are you?</p> <p>G'day Chris, sorry.</p> <p>Justin's just here.</p>
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>It's not Chris' first solar build, he's worked on four - here and overseas, one in The Philippines where safety standards were extremely different to all the Personal Protective Equipment, PPE, that's swooshing and reflecting all over the Australian sites.</p> <p>Energy produced will go back into the grid and it's a neat fit for Narromine community.</p>
CHRIS ROWLAND	<p>The size here is to virtually feed the three and a half thousand homes and offices and commercial operations around Narromine itself so we're</p>

	actually limited to 9.9 meg AC of exportation out of here, the size of the plant is 11 meg DC so your DC and AC are never...
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>Community sentiment has featured heavily in some of the podcast stories we've had so far.</p> <p>Here it's no different. Justin's been at community meetings fielding questions from locals.</p>
JUSTIN SHEPHERD	There's a lot of interest from the locals about will something coming out of one of the panels there be coming into our house, and we explained the ocean of electricity and where it's coming from.
COURTNEY CARTY	Just quickly, the ocean Justin just mentioned is a handy metaphor you can use to visualise the contribution of different energy sources to the national grid, each source is like a river, they all run into the ocean and when we need water we get it out there with all the water from the rivers mixed together.
JUSTIN SHEPHERD	But they were all very interested in how it all worked. And there was a real positive attitude of people, even with the older crowd, wanting to have this in place.
COURTNEY CARTY	The enthusiasm Justin mentioned shouldn't be surprising if you know anything about the history of solar in Dubbo.
MATHEW	Mathew Dickerson, former Mayor of Dubbo City Council.
COURTNEY CARTY	Mathew says solar was already popular in the town.
<b>MATHEW DICKERSON</b>	Solar in general is incredibly important to Dubbo. One of my proud moments in terms of council involvement and making a difference was a scheme I put together with a local energy provider and Council to try and encourage people to put solar panels on the roofs of their houses. It's obviously a very good area for solar panels. We've got great sunlight, we've got lots of days without clouds. And as a result of that scheme and some other changes that happened from a NSW Government's perspective Dubbo has been and still remains as the number one solar connector on a per capita basis in this nation.

	<p>So solar in Dubbo is incredibly powerful. You see an incredible number of roofs of houses with solar on them. And people talk about it, it is a talking point where we talk about what return we get for our electricity, what we're doing in terms of our electricity bills. When someone comes along to say, 'I want to build a solar farm', there's a bit of a puffing out of the chest for the people in Dubbo, because we feel like we get solar. We feel like we understand that we're in a great spot for solar and we feel like not only is it financially sensible, but from an environmental perspective it's incredibly important for our children and grandchildren and future generations to come.</p> <p>Obviously we can't just keep digging up coal forever. We're going to run out of coal to dig up, we can't keep polluting the environment forever. We're doing damage to the environment across the world with climate change as we speak.</p> <p>So solar makes a lot of sense and I think people in Dubbo are proud about any project that involves solar. And it's all well and good for us to have our little three kilowatt or 10 kilowatt systems on the roof of our house, but when someone comes along to build a major solar farm we think that's great from a Dubbo perspective, from an economic perspective, and probably most importantly, from an environmental perspective.</p>
AMY KEAN	People don't realise we're a solar superpower!
COURTNEY CARTY	Amy Kean
AMY KEAN	I'm the NSW Renewable Energy Advocate and I work at the NSW department of planning and environment.
COURTNEY CARTY	Amy says NSW and Australia have come an exceptionally long way in adopting solar technology.
AMY KEAN	Looking back, when I started working, when I left uni about 20 years ago we pretty much had a 1.5 kilowatt system in Sydney, and that was a demonstration system on a government roof.
COURTNEY CARTY	If you wanted the equivalent solar capacity today as New South Wales had nearly two decades ago it'll cost you about \$1,700 online.

AMY KEAN	And today we now have a million homes with solar on their roofes and large scale solar has taken off in a unpredicted way.
COURTNEY CARTY	And now this is the landscape...
AMY KEAN	...three massive solar generators in NSW that are farming the sun every day.
COURTNEY CARTY	They're in Moree, Broken Hill and from last episode Nyngan, and another four, including Narromine and Dubbo, are due to be completed this year.  Seven large scale solar farms might sound like a lot but it won't for long, many more are in the pipeline.
AMY KEAN	Ten with planning approval and a massive 18 in the planning system. So overnight the industry has gone from a very infant concept to a booming industry, and that's very much driven by certainly federal government support but also the plummeting cost of solar. So no one would have predicted this a few years ago. It's something we should be very proud of.
COURTNEY CARTY	And the three leaders in New South Wales?
AMY KEAN	The highest uptake of solar on people's homes is Liverpool Dubbo and Lismore.
COURTNEY CARTY	And it's not just the uptake in those places, no it's the industry and market as a whole.

<p>AMY KEAN</p>	<p>I don't think we realised how quickly it was going to grow from effectively a new industry to an industry that's now quickly beginning to operate on its own without government subsidies and that's exactly what we want out of new industries but that transition has happened so quickly.</p> <p>And I think what's also, what's really exciting is the acceptance from the local communities as well. I was out at Moree the other day and you've got the local mayor saying, 'we love farming the sun we want to breed more solar farms, come here we want you!'</p> <p>And the fact that it co-exists with agriculture so well it can provide a stable income in times of drought, means that farmers get the potential.</p> <p>I get excited that it's happening now, it's unstoppable and the future's bright, as they say (laughs).</p>
<p>COURTNEY CARTY</p>	<p>And it looks that way for Dubbo. And while Mathew Dickerson says the city can seem a bit confused, growing from a small country town to gaining status as a city in 1966, it seems to be for the better.</p>

<p>MATHEW DICKERSON</p>	<p>We still think of ourselves as being a small country town where we still know the person that we go and buy our groceries off and we know people as we walk down the main street.</p> <p>But the reality is that Dubbo is now a thriving metropolis. We are only a population of 42,000 but we have a service population of anywhere up to 200,000 because as you go west of Dubbo you've got many small communities that see Dubbo as an essential service centre.</p> <p>So if you need to see a doctor or a professional, see an accountant for example or a solicitor... a whole range of different professions base themselves out of Dubbo because they can know they can service the entire region. A whole range of organisations, say trades for example, may set themselves up in Dubbo and have their trades people go out and do work in that entire region.</p> <p>So there are time where we feel like a thriving metropolis, a very modern city, you can get a great coffee when you go down the street. So we feel like we're a big city, but at times we feel like just a good old fashioned country town. And as we keep growing that'll be the confusing point, as we continue to grow, I think people that move here now probably see us more as a thriving metropolis.</p> <p>People like myself, I've been here for almost 50 years, and people like myself that have been here for a long period of time, still probably think of ourselves as that small country town and that's part of that growing pain that many towns/cities across Australia are experiencing.</p>
<p>COURTNEY CARTY</p>	<p>One of those who's left inland metropolis is David Hood he moved out of the city a few kilometres down the road. We didn't bump into each other at the ideal time. I thought he was turning into the side road off the highway to come and give me a hand.</p>
<p>DAVID HOOD</p>	<p>I'm the next property over from the solar farm.</p>



COURTNEY CARTY	<p>And we're standing, you'll be able to hear it in a sec, we're standing on the side of the road where I've beached my car, oh god.</p> <p>Making a U-Turn to get to the dubbo solar farm, I'd managed to beach the car on a mound and had time to spare while the tow truck came to get me unstuck.</p> <p>You grew up on this site? And now you've moved back.</p>
DAVID HOOD	<p>Yeah, lived in town for 15 years I suppose, 16 years, and then I've finally built a house and moved back out here.</p>
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>Is your bedroom just the way you left it?</p>
DAVID HOOD	<p>Yeah, pretty much. Mum and Dad haven't let anyone move into it.</p>
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>Can you tell me what you know about the solar farm?</p>
DAVID HOOD	<p>I don't know a great deal about it, I know there's a fair bit of working going over there.</p>
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>Do you have conversations with your neighbours about it?</p>
DAVID HOOD	<p>We did originally, my sister lives right beside it so she's happy to have it there instead of a hundred houses or whatever, that sort of thing so, only got a solar farm to look at, it's not that ugly.</p>
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>Are you concerned about any part of it?</p>
DAVID HOOD	<p>I'm not. They were a little bit concerned maybe if there was any perimeter lighting around it. But other than that, there's no other real concerns.</p>
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>Do your friends ask you about it?</p>

DAVID HOOD	Yeah, they think it's a vineyard going in there, people driving past, see all the posts in and think 'is there another winery going in?'
COURTNEY CARTY	There was going to be something else built on the site where the solar farm is?
DAVID HOOD	Yeah originally, probably 15 years ago or whenever the Wellington jail was built they proposed to build the jail there. And we protested against it and got rid of it.
COURTNEY CARTY	Much nicer use of land having a solar farm on it.
DAVID HOOD	Oh god yeah, much happier, much happier.
COURTNEY CARTY	Is that?
DAVID HOOD	That would be my father.
COURTNEY CARTY	A ute's just gone past and Dad's driving into it.
MUSIC	MUSIC
COURTNEY CARTY	Turns out there's a bit more to the story of the jail. And it goes back decades back to a proposal by the New South Wales' Government to build a zoo. Mathew Dickerson again...

<p>MATHEW DICKERSON</p>	<p>One of the most important businesses in Dubbo, and certainly the most important from a tourist perspective is Taronga Western Plains Zoo and the story goes, this is way back before my time, the story goes, back in the late 60s early 70s the NSW Government was looking for somewhere to put the zoo. And they started looking initially at Wellington, which is a town located about 50 km closer to Sydney than Dubbo.</p> <p>And the funny story is, the local member here who's now passed away, but the local member Tony McGrane used to tell the story that he was involved with National Farmers Association and they wanted the National Farmers to write to the NSW Government to say they didn't want a zoo in prime farm land around Wellington because they were worried about lions escaping from the zoo and going and taking all their livestock and they hadn't had a problem with wild dogs, they didn't want wild lions and tigers roaming around taking all their important livestock.</p> <p>The general story around Wellington although it's hard to find specific information was that Wellington said 'we don't want the zoo thank you very much, we don't want wild animals roaming our farms, roaming down the main street, so we don't want it.'</p> <p>And then as a second choice it was offered to Dubbo, and the leaders of Dubbo at the time jumped at the chance for this wonderful facility to be built and it was opened in 1977.</p> <p>Obviously people in Wellington thought afterwards that it wasn't such a bad thing given the fact that the tourism that goes through the zoo is, we've got over a quarter of a million people each year.</p> <p>Many years later the opportunity came up to build another jail somewhere in inland NSW and they started looking around the Dubbo-Wellington area and a few people in Dubbo thought it mightn't be too bad an idea for our economy but in general most people in Dubbo weren't that excited. And Wellington people remembered they missed out on the zoo so they were a bit annoyed about that so they jumped up and down and said, 'we'll have the jail because that will boost our employment as well'.</p> <p>So in the end the jail went to Wellington, they got to have the jail so that boosted their employment certainly with the number of people working through there and Dubbo obviously has kept the zoo.</p> <p>Obviously the zoo has not just the employment but the tourism numbers. There's not a lot of tourists that go through and look at a jail, unfortunately.</p>
<p>MUSIC</p>	<p>MUSIC</p>

COURTNEY CARTY	Getting the car stuck wasn't the only time I'd managed to embarrass myself in Dubbo. Justin Shepherd at the solar farm again...
JUSTIN SHEPHERD	I always love the question, I've had the question a couple of times, 'does the power that comes out of this farm, can this be used for three phase power'?
COURTNEY CARTY	And just for my benefit, it can't be used for three phase power?
JUSTIN SHEPHERD	No, absolutely it can be. It's just how the electrons...
COURTNEY CARTY	Put your hand up if you've got a history degree.
MUSIC	THEME

<p>COURTNEY CARTY</p>	<p>The solar farms in Dubbo and Narromine currently under construction are due to be completed later this year.</p> <p>Together they're a 29 megawatt project. They'll produce enough electricity to offset 16000 cars or 53000 tonnes of carbon dioxide while powering around 9000 average homes.</p> <p>Next episode, and the final episode in this series, we're off to Emu Downs, inland from Cervantes in Western Australia about 2 hours north of Perth, wide sandy farming land with a few mines out the back.</p> <p>Including Emu Downs, the solar farms we've visited will be saving over half a million tonnes of CO2 from the atmosphere each year. Just 6 farms. As Amy Kean mentioned earlier, nearly 30 projects are in the pipeline thanks to cost in technology and construction coming down. And the seed funding from organisations like ARENA. Not to forget the jobs and benefit to local economies like Dubbo's.</p> <p>Please leave a review about the show wherever you listen to podcasts and let a friend know.</p> <p>If you've got any questions or comments please get in touch with ARENA on social media or via the website - <a href="http://www.arena.gov.au">www.arena.gov.au</a></p> <p>I'm Courtney Carthy... thanks for listening to ReWired...</p> <p>The Reels aren't the only well known band to come out of Dubbo, you might have heard of Thirsty Merc made it down the highway to national fame in the 2000s...</p>
<p>MUSIC</p>	<p>In the Summertime</p>